YUKON ADVISORY COUNCIL

ON

FIRST NATIONS CHILD WELFARE

ANNUAL REPORT

1996/97

YUKON ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
FIRST NATIONS CHILD WELFARE
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August 26, 1997

Honorable Dave Sloan
Minister of Health and social Services
Government of Yukon
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

Dear Honorable Mr. Sloan:

On behalf of the Yukon Advisory Council on First Nations Child Welfare, I am pleased to present you with our 1996/97 Annual Report.

This report covers highlights of council activities during the period between April 1, 1996 and March 31, 1997.

Sincerely,

Pat Martin
Chair

/dml

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Yukon Advisory Council on First Nations Child Welfare
ANNUAL REPORT 1996/97

CONTENTS

Message from the Chair 1

Membership 2

Formation and Mandate 3

Meetings 4

Highlights from Meetings 5

Council Activities 7

Goals for 1997/98 12

Financial Statement 13

Contact Address 14

Yukon Advisory Council on First Nations Child Welfare
ANNUAL REPORT 1996/97

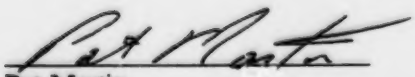
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In this report, activities of the Council are outlined and information of new initiatives are previewed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each member of the Advisory Council for their efforts in working together to be a valuable advisory body for both the Minister of Health and Social Services and Family and Children's Services. I deem it a privilege to work with a group devoted to improving the quality of life for our First Nation children.

I would also like to give special thanks to past members, Sandra Johnson and Lorraine Sterriah for their continued support and dedication to the Council. Their contribution during their terms as appointed members has been appreciated.

On behalf of the Advisory Council, I would like to extend an invitation to individuals or organizations who are interested in presenting their concerns or issues with regard to First Nation child welfare matters. Please contact us at Box 5492, Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 5H4, or contact our secretariat at 667-4394 (phone) or 393-3904 (fax).



Pat Martin
Chair

Yukon Advisory Council on First Nations Child Welfare
ANNUAL REPORT 1996/97

MEMBERSHIP

Pat Martin, Chair

Agnes Johnson, Vice-Chair

John Edzerza

Kathy Magun

Percy Henry

Dorothy John

Brenda Sam

* Sandra Johnson

* Lorraine Sterriah

* member's term of appointment ended during this reporting period.

FORMATION AND MANDATE

The formation of the Council began in 1987 when the Minister of the day identified a need for greater involvement of First Nation people in child welfare services. The Council was approved during the summer of 1988 under regulations pursuant to the Children's Act, Section 177(1)d. The first meeting of the Advisory Council on First Nations Child Welfare took place in September 1988.

The Council's identified fundamental principle is for the well being of the child. Section 3 of the Regulations under the Mandate states:

(1) The Advisory Council shall advise the Executive Council member on matters concerning the welfare of Indian children in the Yukon which the Executive Council Member refers to the Council for its advice.

(2) The Advisory Council may advise the Executive Council Member on those matters concerning the welfare of Indian children in the Yukon which the Advisory Council thinks it is appropriate to bring to the Executive Member's attention.

(3) The Advisory Council may:

- *(a) consider submissions and suggestions from individuals and groups concerning the welfare of Indian children;*
- *(b) recommend and undertake research on matters concerning the welfare of Indian children;*
- *(c) recommend policies and legislation to enhance the welfare of Indian children;*
- *(d) recommend and participate in the development of services concerning the welfare of Indian children;*
- *(e) publish reports and information on matters concerning the welfare of Indian children.*

MEETINGS

The Council is required to hold meetings at least four times per year. During the 1996/97 fiscal year, the Council was able to hold five two-day regular meetings. Three meetings were held at the Council of Yukon First Nations building and two meetings were held at the Child Development Centre in Whitehorse on the following dates:

May 9, 10, 1996
September 19, 20, 1996
December 12, 13, 1996
February 13, 14, 1997

In addition to the Council members, the following guests attended:

Health and Social Services:

Honorable Dave Sloan: Minister of Health and Social Services
Honorable Mickey Fisher: Minister of Health and Social Services
Linda Dixon: Executive Assistant to the Minister
Anne Sheffield: Director of Family and Children's Services
Charles Pugh: Residential Services Coordinator
Elaine Schroeder: Supervisor, Family and Children's Services
Tim Brady: Manager, Youth Services
Carol Cunningham: Youth Worker, Youth Services
Nancy Duesner: Treatment Coordinator, Child Abuse Treatment Centre
Mary Jane Oliver: Social Worker, Family and Children's Services
Cathy Deacon: Youth Sex Offender Treatment Program
Annette Dicquemare: Regional Outreach Worker, Child Abuse Trtm. Svcs.

Also in attendance:

Other Government Departments:

Maureen Mahoney: Policy Analyst, Department of Justice
Jeddie Russell: Women and Wellness Program, Yukon College

Community Services:

Mary Jane Jim: Traditional Parenting Program, Skookum Jim's
Jim Bentley: Director, Northern Network of Services
Sandy Gleason: Crime Prevention Coordinator, CYFN Justice
Pat Joe: Child Welfare and Social Development, Kwanlin Dun First Nation
Janet Whitfield: Children's Receiving Home
Sandra Gibbs: Gibbs Group Homes
Valerie Binder: FAS/FAE Worker

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MEETINGS

Mediation Program

Elaine Schroeder, Supervisor of Family and Children's Services was invited to inform the Council on departmental activities concerning the development of a mediation program. The Department reviewed mediation projects in the child protection area that are already in place in provinces such as Nova Scotia and BC. A steering committee was formed to look at the feasibility of putting such a program in place in the Yukon. This method of mediation has always been viewed as one tool in working with children and families in a variety of situations, but is not the ultimate answer in every case. Elaine noted that sometimes it is helpful for a neutral third party to be available to sit down with the involved parties and help work out a plan that is agreeable to everyone. Some issues that might be mediated are: placement, access, foster/biological parent, family reintegration, etc.

It was reported that this project will initially be Whitehorse-focussed, but if mediators are available to travel, mediation could be offered in outlying communities as well. This will be the first program that will be given a full-scale evaluation.

The Council expressed their support of this pilot project in hopes of utilizing tools such as this prior to any court action. Council suggested that the Department involve First Nations, specifically the Chief and Council in the communities, in each developmental stage of this project prior to implementation.

Cultural Programming

The Council was included in discussions about establishing a small working group that would look at culturally appropriate programming, particularly in residential programs in the Yukon. It was felt that this would be a good opportunity to do some educational work with departmental and group home staff. It also would provide an opportunity to unitedly define what culture is and how it can have a therapeutic effect on First Nation children. The Department related that all of their programs provide cultural components, however, more guidelines are required to specify what these components should be comprised of and what their expected results should be.

Council members were asked to sit on and provide input into this Cultural Programming Committee.

Wilderness Camp

Maureen Mahoney and Tim Brady made a presentation to the Council on a Wilderness Leadership Camp pilot project which was made reference to in the Creating Safer Communities: Property-Related Crime paper. Creating Safer Communities is a joint effort by various government departments: justice, H&SS, C&TS, Women's Directorate, Education and the RCMP.

The pilot project is in the very beginning stages of development. The idea came from Manitoba, where a similar program has been offered in the communities very successfully for more than ten years now. Council viewed a video about the Manitoba project and discussed its proposed development in the Yukon. The program stresses leadership training and recreation for children between the ages of 6 and 13.

It was related that the youth population in the Yukon is steadily growing and the group of youths aged 12-17 will increase by 35% this year. Inactivity and boredom in youths leads to a variety of problems. These statistics make the need apparent for youths to be busy in wholesome activities that build self-respect and respect for family and community values.

Child Development for Health

Jeddie Russell related that the main contributing factor to the health of women is a woman's activity between the ages of 0 and 16. Breast disease, diabetes and menopausal symptoms are related to activity and nutrition during the youth years. In order to promote health and safety, the concept of children having authority over their own bodies needs to be inculcated. Kids in care need to get out on the land and got involved in physical activity. When focusing on healing, it is important not to limit it to emotional or spiritual healing, but to include physical healing as well. Physical healing is not treatment; it comes from within. We need to feel self-worth and importance as an individual.

Family Group Conferencing

Carol Cunningham from the Youth Probation Office's Diversion Program and Mary Jane Oliver from Family and Children's Services made a presentation to the Council regarding Family Group Conferencing. Mary Jane has done work to create a program using family group conferencing with kids under 12 years of age who have committed an illegal offence.

Carol Cunningham explained that Family Group Conferencing is a program that has been modeled after the methods used by the Maori First nation people in New Zealand. This approach of dealing with young people who have committed offenses has been in practice for centuries. The approach was passed by law in 1989 in New Zealand and later was introduced in Australia. The purpose is to try to resolve the situation and repair the damage that has been caused.

The Yukon program will target young people aged 6-11 involved in an illegal situation. The program is being offered in Whitehorse, but will expand to the communities as the program develops.

Youth Sex Offender Treatment Program

Cathy Deacon made a presentation to the Advisory Council and related that the program has been operating since 1984. Services have recently been offered to people outside of Whitehorse, however, they still need to travel to Whitehorse to receive treatment.

This program seems to be very successful with the kids who have received treatment. However, many kids who need help are not receiving it due to over-demand. The Council strongly recommended that more assistance in the way of manpower and funding be provided to this program in order to expand its success to kids who desperately need its services.

Child Abuse Treatment Services

An Outreach Worker for the CATS program was hired to travel to and offer services and workshops in the communities. This will hopefully provide CATS with some understanding of what the needs in the communities are and help to develop appropriate programs.

Council recommended that an additional Outreach Worker be hired to assist in the communities, since currently there is a 6 month on/ 6 month off schedule to work half the communities in the Yukon during one six month period.

Crime Prevention Program

Sandy Gleason provided an information package to the Council which included a variety of information on the undertakings of the Crime Prevention Program. Sandy explained that the majority of research shows that it is possible to predict if a child will have problems with the law as early as preschool. Nothing is done with these kids at this age and they tend to become a type of outcast to society.

The majority of offenders going to jail had issues they were trying to deal with as a child and they typically were involved with three systems: in care, in juvenile system and later in adult justice system. Many of them had been physically, sexually, or mentally abused or were exposed to dysfunctional homes, family violence, and/or a history of substance abuse.

The children's most important developmental period is during the first seven years of life, after that it becomes very difficult to change some of their behaviours. These problem children need to have support and attention in the very early years. We need to put effort into more positive approaches with these children, trying to get them involved in activities, and getting their families involved with them.

Sandy is working on the community action plan through the NCPC. She is working with governments and communities on developing an action plan to implement this information. She stressed that encouragement needs to be given to establish proactive communities, rather than reactive communities.

Northern Network of Services

The Director of Northern Network of Services provided regular presentations to the Council. The Council is always interested in the activities at NNS.

The children in the care of NNS have the opportunity to be involved in the summer camps offered, ie. Mayo Wilderness Camp. They are also looking at establishing their own wilderness camp in the future.

NNS is continually seeking for care-giver homes, especially in the communities.

Children's Receiving Home / Gibbs Group Homes

The Council toured the Children's Receiving Home facility and met with the Director, Janet Whitfield. Janet discussed the operation of her Receiving Home and was able to respond to general questions that were raised by the council members.

Subsequently, the Directors of the Children's Receiving Home and Gibbs Group Homes were invited to meet with the Council to discuss their programs in detail, specifically the cultural component in each of the programs offered.

The Council highlighted the need to have more adequate cultural components incorporated into the programs.

The Department related that the new contracts to care for children in the care of the Director will be more specific on cultural components and will ensure that the requirements of the contracts are met. The Department also said that emphasis will be put on First Nation staffing at the group homes in order for First Nation youths to be more comfortable talking about their culture and making suggestions and cultural requests.

The Advisory Council stated that they would like to be made more aware of what is happening in the group homes with regard to First Nation children.

FAS/FAE

Valerie Binder was invited to give a presentation to the Council on FAS in the territory. She explained that FAS is a disability, not a result of poor parenthood, schooling, etc. It is a direct result of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and is therefore be 100% preventable.

She related that 90% of males with FAS/FAE end up in the justice system, and 90% of females end up in abusive relationships.

FAS kids need to learn life skills rather than focus on academic education to help them feel happy and productive. In the education system, emphasis should be placed on helping these children learn practical skills that can be applied in daily life, for example, home economics, cooking, banking, laudry, time management.

Val stressed the importance of raising public awareness and pointed out that even some school teachers do not know what FAS is or how to deal with it. She listed five things required for education of FAS students: supervision, structure, simplicity, teaching in context, and teaching in steps.

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Health and Social Services Council

At the request of the Minister, the Chair of the Advisory Council is also a member of the Health and Social Services Council. The Minister felt that this would contribute towards

better communication and productivity of the two Councils, specifically in areas of joint interests.

FAS/FAE Conference

Two council members travelled to Vancouver to attend the FAS/FAE Conference. The conference showed links between programs and how to help kids in school. The Council members who were in attendance made a presentation to the Council upon their return.

The Council discusses FAS/FAE related issues often and has recommended to the Department that more energy and funding into the area of prevention and working with the affected children is required.

Child Welfare Conference

The Chairperson attended the Child Welfare Conference in Winnipeg. Martin Brokenleg's presentation on "Youth In Care" was delivered at all day workshops during this conference. His message came across clearly: look at the sense of belonging that you give to children in your care.

Learning For Life Conference

Information about the Advisory Council was provided at an information table at this conference held in Whitehorse in October, 1996.

One Council member was in attendance at this conference and reported that it was very successful and beneficial. She related that she especially appreciated the session presented by David Ratree, dealing with Respect vs. Discipline.

GOALS FOR 1997/98

Yukon First Nation Child Welfare Conference

The Yukon First Nations Child Welfare Conference, which was in the planning stages for a number of years, was finally scheduled to occur from April 29 - May 2, 1997.

The conference theme will be "Together Today For Our Children - Our Future" and will provide a unique opportunity to network with the communities in the Yukon and discuss child welfare issues and hear their concerns and issues.

FAS/FAE

Minister Dave Sloan identified FAS/FAE as an issue that would be well to be addressed as a joint venture between the Departments of Health and Education. Mr. Sloan requested that the Council offer advice on education, in light of the need to address the problems related to FAE/FAE in children, as they are eventually ending up in the justice system. The Council will be joining in with other groups on this very important issue and hope to assist in proactive solutions.

Juvenile Justice

Minister Dave Sloan met with the Standing Committee on the Young Offenders Act and related to the Council that it is very clear that we are losing aboriginal youths to the youth justice system. He therefore requested that the Council review this matter during the next year and offer suggestions on what kinds of things can be done in the First Nation communities to steer young First Nation people out of the formalized justice system, ie. diversion programs or circles.

Newsletter

In order to promote awareness of the Council's function and it's activities, plans are being made to publish a periodic newsletter that will be distributed to First Nations community organizations. To ensure you are on our mailing list to receive a copy of this newsletter, please contact us at the address on Page 16.

YUKON ADVISORY COUNCIL ON FIRST NATIONS CHILD WELFARE
INCOME STATEMENT
FOR PERIOD OF April 1, 1996 TO March 31, 1997

REVENUE:		
94/95 Surplus	* $10 844.07	
Contribution Agreement (April)	56 200.00	
TOTAL REVENUE		**$67 044.07**
EXPENSES:		
Travel	$5 691.60	
Meals and Incidentals	3 042.90	
Child Care	624.00	
Honorarium	18 500.00	
Accommodation	2 152.03	
Refreshments/Lunch	849.37	
Administrative Support	8 510.00	
Telephone	730.62	
Office and Other Expenses	866.42	
Conferences	2 236.29	
Yukon FNCW Conference	1 082.30	
TOTAL EXPENSES		$44 285.53
BALANCE, March 31, 1997		$22 758.54

* dedicated conference funds carried over from previous year

CONTACT ADDRESS:

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Y1A 5H4

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FAX: 393-3904